

Urges Legislators to Protect Victims' Right to Their Day In Court October 27, 2009

WASHINGTON- U.S. Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) [spoke today](#) on the floor of the House of Representatives in support of an amendment to protect the rights of assault victims to seek justice. Rep. Melancon urged his colleagues to include in the final FY10 Defense Appropriations bill an amendment that would ban federal contracts to companies that restrict their employees' access to courts of law. The Franken Amendment (S.AMDT 2588), which passed the Senate on a bi-partisan vote of 68-30, bars funds for contractors who use mandatory arbitration clauses in their employment contracts, clauses that can deny assault victims their day in court.

The amendment was prompted by a recent case in which a young woman who said she was raped while working for a defense contractor in Iraq later learned that a clause in her contract barred her from taking her case to court. Instead, her contract forced her into an arbitration process run by her company.

In his floor speech today, Rep. Melancon said, **"No American citizen should ever have to sign away his or her right to justice in order to get a job. And not a dime of taxpayer money should go to companies that would rather sweep an assault under the rug than allow our justice system to work.... If we fail to enact this measure, we will have failed to protect the rights and values we were sworn to uphold when we took our oath of office. We can not let that happen."**

In early October, Rep. Melancon [sent a letter](#) urging the House committee leadership to include the Franken Amendment in the final Defense Appropriations bill

Rep. Melancon's floor speech can be viewed on his YouTube Channel here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RepCharlieMelancon>

Below is the text of his speech as prepared for delivery.

Mr. Speaker,

Many of us have heard the terrible story of Jamie Leigh Jones, the employee of a U.S. defense contractor who said she was brutally attacked and sexually assaulted by her co-workers while working in Iraq in 2005. Instead of being allowed to seek justice, Jamie Leigh was held in a shipping container by company employees so she couldn't report the crime.

When Jamie Leigh returned to the US, she learned that a clause in her contract barred her from taking her case to court. Instead, it forced her into a company-run arbitration process, the same company that failed to protect her in the first place.

It is our responsibility to make sure this horrific story can never happen again. No American citizen should ever have to sign away his or her right to justice in order to get a job. And not a dime of taxpayer money should go to companies that would rather sweep an assault under the

rug than allow our justice system to work.□

The Franken Amendment will forbid federal dollars from going to companies that engage in these practices. If we fail to enact this measure, we will have failed to protect the rights and values we were sworn to uphold when we took our oath of office.□ We can not let that happen.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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